

**THE UNDER-PRIVILEGED COMMUNITIES AND  
THEIR RESPONSES TO DEVELOPMENT:  
THREE DEVELOPING TRIBAL COMMUNITIES  
IN  
INDIA, ASIA**

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She is an Associate on Current Anthropology(Canada) in Sociology and Cultural Anthropology. Her publications include the following:-

<u>Title</u>	<u>Subject</u>
1. <u>The Missionary Among the Khasis.</u> Published (1977)	Cultural Anthropology ICSSR
2. <u>The Functioning of Democracy in an Assamese and Khasi Village:</u> A Comparative Study (1978)	Political Sociology. (Under Publication) NEHU
3. <u>Settlement Pattern of Some Tribal Groups of the North-East - The Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya</u> (1978)	Cultural Anthropology Mimeographed and under print in the World Congress Abstracts.
4. <u>A Study of the Committees and Commissions appointed by the Government of India for Tribal Welfare in Post-Independent India</u> (1979)	Applied Anthropology. (Under Publication) IIPA
5. <u>Tribal India: Some Dimensions of Development.</u> (1980)	Development Administration. IIPA
6. <u>The Agricultural Project</u> (i) <u>A Helping Relationship</u> (ii) <u>The Small Farmer</u> (1981)	Administration for Agriculture IIPA
7. <u>Tribalscape: XI</u> (1982)	Social Anthropology IIPA

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THE UNDER-PRIVILEGED COMMUNITIES AND THEIR RESPONSES  
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(PP1- 14)

DR. NALINI NATARAJAN

Introduction:

The Indian National Paper at the U.N. Conference on Science and Technology for Development in Vienna in August 1979 suggested a new development concept. The earlier development assessment in GNP Terms was redefined and it chose structure and distribution as the basis of assessment. Even in developing countries where economic prosperity is so necessary to alleviate poverty and improve the quality of life, the recent concern is to examine afresh the development construct as distinct from that of economic prosperity alone. Emphasis is on \*parity, \*a fair distribution of development benefits and \*reaching the underprivileged. Such a step would result in two major features; it would

1. Enhance the respect and understanding of the other's view of the developed and developing countries; and
2. It would also help build more permanent national perspectives and objectives desirable in an increasingly interdependent and one world where man is a citizen of the world and a member of the human family as Goldsmith stated.

The basic problem is to distinguish between human development and economic prosperity which together constitute progress. Humanity and economic self-interest-both are necessary. Within the development spectrum growth with justice must extend to the underprivileged groups with social and economic etc. handicaps. The tribals of India form such a



group. The isolated ones, in particular, lack the three distinct development traits of manifestations - comprehension, confidence and competence.

This presentation uses primarily the trinary comparative method to assess and analyse in brief 3 micro-universes of isolated Indian tribal groups. The study, a mix of primary and secondary data, also relates them to the process and scale of development - low, medium and high. The 3 micro-universes are of simple, isolated and poor tribal communities living amidst nature and surviving mainly on subsistence agriculture and resisting, or being non-responsive to development schemes. All the three underprivileged groups are exposed to urban influences. The accent in the study is more on:

\*physical health \*formal education and basic creative training \*communications \*culture and \*economic infrastructures. All the three under-privileged tribal groups namely the Tharus, the Abhujmadias (Abhujmarias) and the Totos have just begun to accept change. The slow pace of development, acceptance by a few, disinterestedness and non-response and the emergence of a few powerful or elite tribals are new features of the three underprivileged tribal micro-universes described in brief below.

THREE UNDER-PRIVILEGED MICRO-TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: UNIVERSE I: The Tharus

The 1st universe consists of about 230 aboriginal matrilineal <sup>local</sup> Tharu tribals with mongoloid features who inhabit

in  
village 'X' / the thick jungles of West Champaran district of Bihar bordering Nepal. They have a close affinity with the Tharus of Naini Tal and Kheri in Uttar Pradesh.

The pretty and energetic Tharu women love to sing and dance, but there is no communal merry-making. They have a dominant position in the matrilineal Tharu community. There is active participation of Tharu women in economic and social activities outside the home; Tharu women are seen at markets and fairs and they smoke and drink in public. Menfolk are not allowed to enter their kitchens, nor do they eat food cooked by male members. The contemporary Tharu women use cosmetics and modern dresses. This is attributed by one scholar to the influence of Nepali women living across the border.

The incidence of poverty is extremely high among the Tharus and the majority is illiterate. The mahajans, the money-lenders exploit the simple Tharus amongst whom high degree of indebtedness and land alienation prevail. The land-grabbers (1) modus operandi is simple- to lend money to poor Tharus who keep on borrowing when in need. The illiterate and trusting Tharus do not understand loan intricacies. After about a year, they are forced to sign papers effecting land-transfer from them to money-lenders. The method of a critical incident is cited below. A Tharu had to part with 12 'bighas' i.e. about 4 acres of land for one bottle of kerosene. The extreme poverty compels Tharu children to work and they have

to make do with cottons in the winter. The problems are those of exploitation and economic emancipation. There is need to stem the increasing incidences of indebtedness and land alienation, and to raise the literacy level. Emergent problems of child labour and forthcoming change in the matrilineal social structure need consideration to.

In sum, in the case of the poor matrilineal Tharus of the jungles of South Champaran, the winds of change have just begun. The non-response is by men who apprehend that change may not benefit them. The areas of resistance are partly the extreme poverty and general disinterestedness because of illiteracy and problems of survival. In case of women, the modern outlook is superficial as in the case of use of the modern dress and cosmetics. Remedies lie in ending the in-ward looking attitude of the Tharu society, involving women in development schemes as they are influential creating a community-feeling among them in place of the emerging individual trend, and organising the Tharus to provide better marketing and credit facilities. The low development level is the challenge and motivation is necessary.

#### Universe 2 The Abhujhmarias

The 2nd micro-universe consists of the Abhujhmarias (also Abhujhmarias), inhabitants of the 'unknown hills' in Narainpur tehsil of Bastar in Madhya Pradesh, Central India, who lack the desire for change inspite of 5 development plans



in the country. Visits were to two villages - Orcha and Ader. This lack of desire on the part of the Abhujmarias moving in the jungles and unmindful of the schemes of development and goals of administration is one problem.

A local official said that another constraint in development was a problem before administration: the inability of planners to find a definite strategy for tribal development. His emphasis was on the incompatibility of modernising the simple and poor tribals while maintaining traditional ways. The dichotomy in the development strategy has resulted in a communication gap between the administration and the tribals.

In primitive Bastar, people living on the peripheries have seen some development and have contact with the outside world, the Abhoj Mad hills area are totally isolated. The 16,000 sq.km. area spread over 7 hills is unsurveyed. In 1971 Census, only one of the 4,000 families of the 17,000 population was above the poverty line. Lack of socio-economic data-base for development and the unsurveyed hilly area form another constraint in development.

Details of bi-village visits are given below. At the village Orcha, when children were photographed, they wanted five rupees as 'fee'-- a charge following visits of foreign tourists. Similarly, in the 'ghotel', a local dormitory type tribal institution now dying, the younger generation is taught tribal arts, crafts, music, dance and history. The payment of Rs.50/- per dancer is now an expectation but it would be



dubbed an affront 25 years ago to the hosts. Thus the importance of cash in an economy transforming from the monetised into the non-monetised one has been realised. In the village of Ader, the available is villagers and a few children were friendly but the language presented direct communication with researchers.

The rural development profile reflects on the grim poverty and is dark, but some change is witnessed. The Abhooj tribals do , shifting cultivation. They raise cattle only for beef and shun milk as animal secretion. The jungles have little game and no birds or animals were seen. A major debitating factor in the way of progress of Abhooj Mad is Sulphi, a secretion which is drunk. In the early morning, its effect is not intoxicating but <sup>it</sup> becomes like toddy when the sun rises higher. It kills appetities, or satiates hunger and researchers say that because of the sulphi, the tribal will not care to earn money. These tribals are willing workers but are fond of watching cock-fights as amusement. They are carefree and satisfied with jaunts in the village. The problem is one of non-response. The slow pace of development is attributed to tribals playing truant.

The remot-eness of the area makes it difficult to bring labourers from outside. Labour in-migration is difficult. Motivation and increasing involvement are challenges before the development functionaries. Weaning away people from Sulphi, cock-fight amusement and care-free jaunts in the jungles are problems for the tribal development functionaries.

Universe 3: The Totos

This universe consists of nearly 572 Totos, a sub-Himalayan tribe of Jalpaiguri district (West Bengal) that is facing the problem of extermination and is in the grip of poverty. It extends to the tiny village Totopara, named after the tribe. In the tribe also, the scale of development is low and change has just begun. The sub-tribe has made some headway in their struggle for survival but the spectre of extinction still looms large over them.

The demographic features of the micro-universe of the Toto tribe mentioned below are adequate denominators testifying to the low level of development especially in matters of health. The high death rate, the low birth rate and the high infant mortality rate are threatening this Mongoloid tribe. The increase was by 311 faces to existing 314 tribal members of the community in 1931, during the last 50 years. The tribe had only 86 members in the age-group 30-35 years and 20 infants were below 1 year. This community is exempted from family planning by Government.

Tribal custom allows women pre-marital sex and marriages are solemnised only after conception. Disease is considered 'play' of evil spirits which should be propitiated rather than countered with the medicine. Superstition is one challenge to development functionaries.

Housing of the Totos and their meagre possessions are also indicators of poverty. The Totos live in huts on bamboo

platforms and use rough mattresses, and gunny bags as beds. Earthen pots, enamelware, bamboo tubes and baskets are in common use. Fond of drinks, Totos run their own breweries. The development functionaries also have to wean them away from drinking.

The Toto tribe is in a pre-embryonic stage of transition, just accepting modernisation; the zygote of development is in a state of fermentation. As there is a decline in the traditional orange trade, most Totos have switched to agriculture. The State Government has undertaken a scheme to train them in modern agricultural methods so that they can cultivate cereals and vegetables the year round. The emphasis is on inter -, intra- and multi-cropping patterns. A dairy-cum-poultry farm has been set up to make their economy viable. A Toto group has been trained in poultry technique. Another group has been provided with cattle to encourage them in agricultural activities.

There is an attempt to improve living conditions; already a cluster of dwelling houses in place of their battered bamboo fenced traditional alcoves has been constructed. A few Toto children have been persuaded to go to school -- an indication of a gradual acceptance of modernity. But, the elders are still reluctant to accept any change.

In sum, while the scale of development is low, the tilt is indicated towards the medium. While the process of development has been initiated in the spheres of agriculture,



dairy, poultry, housing, drinking water and education, the identified areas of resistance are:

\*superstition      \*drinking habits      \*elders' reluctance to accept change, and \*non-response of children to schooling and education.

THE THREE MICRO-TRIBAL UNIVERSES AND THE COMPARABILITY:

The three small universes under study consist of 3 under-privileged tribal groups- the Tharus, the Abhujmadias and the Totos living in isolation amidst nature in a subsistent state of economy. Their level of technology is low and formal institutions are few. A second point of comparability is the very early stage<sup>and</sup>/low status in the development scale. A third one is the beginning of change and acceptance of development schemes etc. in some areas as education, of advanced technology in subsistence agriculture, and also the restriction of these to a few people. Resistance, disinterestedness and non-response prevail. Distribution is meagre, restricted to the few and a new and emergent power structure is emerging. There is change in the earlier social structure also.

A summary is given in the form of a table of the three comparable micro-universes of under-privileged tribals described earlier in this paper.



Comparative study of micro-uses of underprivileged tribal groups in India, Asia

Name of Universe & numbers	Location	Years of study and study-type	Occupations	Development Status & general profile	Ass of Develop- me:	Factors	Remedy	Remarks
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Universe of Tharus: 830	Village of Tharus: 191 West Champaran District South Bihar, bordering Nepal Eastern India	1980 1982 Longitudinal study type	Subsistence agriculture small trade & crafts	Low, High incidence of poverty Low level of literacy problems of exploitation by money lender; increasing indebtedness. Problems of increasing land alienation	As participation by women is matrilineal tribal & in economic and social circles outside the group. Official change as in man dress and use of clothes by women. Response by men	Matrilineal social structure 'land' as property and power-source	Motivation Education Economic emancipation. Involvement of women as influential person. Change in attitude of men towards benefits of development	Emergent features of child labour : Change in matrilineal Tharu social structure
Universe 2 Abhujmarias: 985	Villages 101 & 141 Bastar District, Madhya Pradesh Central India	1979; 1982 Longitudinal study type	Shifting cultivation Dancers, dealers in small arts & crafts.	Low. Slow pace. High incidence of poverty. Problems of complex and monetised economy	Gal disinterestedness	Illiteracy & problems of survival due to extreme poverty	Communication. Bridging the gap between development functionaries and tribal clientele	are
					Cial perspective:- lot of definite strategy Ipatability of modernisation and maintaining tradition: a dichotomy in segy.	Difficultly of labour in migration	Motivation	
					keness of area	Carefree attitude love of drink love of a amusement An additional hurdle in planning & approach	Desire to earn cash by children or artists	
					of desire for change	fulness of develop- schemes and goals of nistration	Response of socio-economic data- l. No survey of the hilly	
					tised economy	asis on modernisation of culture and livestock - llory industries	Modernisation of agriculture, and livestock, dairy & poultry etc means: Marketing, credit, storage facilities.	

### Conclusion

The three underprivileged tribal groups namely the Tharus, Abhujmarias (Abhujmadias) and the Totos provide an interesting cluster of micro-groups in a pre-adaptive state of planned development. The studies are longitudinal but in parallel situations, the 3 universes as latitudinal on two grounds.

1. Their isolation, poverty and low development scale link them.

2. The changing profile, a small degree of response, the slow pace of development and polarisation of benefits etc. show upward curves and become another factor of linkage.

The assessment of these isolated tribal groups based on a bi-factorial analysis and a trinary methodology is supported by primary and secondary sources of data: visits, dialogues, and written material. The unsurveyed nature of one universe, the remoteness, the illiteracy, low health, simple technology, gradual induction of new formal institutions such as cooperatives, schools etc., emergent features such as child labour, new leaderships, realisation of cash in an increasingly modernised economy are interesting features which are also useful for replicability. The anthropologists approach has suggested nuances specific to the situation to help in alternatives for development; the matrilineal<sup>oc</sup> structure which indicates winning over men who are apprehensive; the isolation of one



hilly terrain which indicates better transport facilities; the problem of decline in numbers faced by a group where the Government has prevented propagation of the Small Family Norm. In a profile of poverty of an underprivileged group in a planned economy the problems are many - the pace, the type, the direction etc. of development. What emerges is that if prosperity is to replace poverty--parity is the key word. Management, modernisation, optimal results, minimum needs, integration etc. in the process of development require establishing of a rapport to bridge the communication gap. One step in understanding a people is knowing their culture, their way of life. Culture at times has a vitality that is ignored or under-rated, but it can at times be more lasting and effective than the administrative apparatus of the state.

Besides knowing the culture, another step in bridging the communication gap is to evolve local response and this is possible through leaders - established and emergent. A third step is to create accountability in the people, communicate with them and educate them for economic emancipation and social development. These are enduring features of poverty and isolation which need to be tackled. Confidence has to be instilled, the comprehension widened and the competence strengthened. Reaching the underprivileged such as the 3 micro-groups of tribals viz. the Tharus, the Abhoojmarias and the Totos is one aspect among 2 others viz. parity and a fair distribution of

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development benefits in the contemporary construct of development in India. The challenge of development of these underprivileged communities is complex and acquires a new meaning and urgency even in the global context. The U.N. decade has just begin in January this year.

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New Delhi 1982



Notes   Notes

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